

what AMERICA was once about and maybe still
is but barely hanging by its fingernails.
but it's not what the insurance companies are
about. and it's not what communism or puritanism
or fascism or just about any "-ism" except maybe
existentialism or individualism are about.
existentialism in fact didn't just say you
could be free — it said you couldn't escape
your freedom, but millions of people are
doing their damndest to.

and a few weeks later my friend cowboy
bob is quietly replying to a drunk lady
who is demanding to know why he is always
getting into arguments and fights, what
exactly it is that he wants out of life,
what it is that he lives for, and
cowboy bob tells her,

"i only live for two things.
the first is freedom.
so is the second."

COPS GET STRESS-DISABILITY PENSIONS

sitting in the waiting room
of the emergency ward
after having thrown up blood
while on anti-coagulants,
an episode he largely ascribes
to the old academic pressures
of overwork and underpay,
and the new one
of committees dominated
by evangelical feminists
and students encouraged to embrace
every current sociopolitical excuse
for their own deficiencies,
toad spies a sign beneath the t.v.
which says, "warning: do not touch,"

but which at first he reads as,

"warning: do not teach."

I WAS ALWAYS THE LAST ON THE BLOCK TO RECEIVE HIS
SECRET DECODER RING

the teenaged counter girl at wendy's
asks, "would you like a discount, sir?"

"what discount?"

"we have a senior citizen discount, sir."

"oh ... how old do you have
to be ... i'm only fifty-two."

now she colors slightly and says,
"it ... it doesn't really matter.
would you like the discount, sir?"

"sure," i say: "why not?"

my first senior citizen discount
and i don't even really enjoy it.
but i'm sure it's one of many things
that i'll be getting used to now.

DOING MY DENNIS HOPPER IMITATION

i smiled goodbye to the pretty receptionist
at the ymca pool and went to store
my gym bag in the trunk before
driving home. but as i spread my
towel and bathing suit to dry, a
pair of jockey shorts fell out.
i knew there were two pairs,
an extra clean pair and the one
i'd worn to the pool,
so, instinctively, i raised this one
to my nose to ascertain which
one was which. they were the
fresh ones, but my eyes fell on the
sweet young thing who'd followed me
out with the membership card i'd left
back at the desk.

THE LAST COMIDA

it had been at least a year since
i had eaten at pancho's, a place that for over
thirty years has been serving good, plentiful,
and inexpensive meals to students, families, and
older people in a bright, clean, no-frills setting,
supervised, both kitchen and dining room,
by pancho and his family.

tonight i ordered, a la carte,
a chorizo tostada, a chicken enchilada,
and a beer. no soup, no salad, no rice,